

Awakening

by amarie

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Summary: Before she awakened to the Matrix, Trinity lived her life in a dream...

Awakening

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AWAKENING

**Come, see**

**Real flowers**

**Of this painful world**

-BASHO

NEW YORK CITY, _Twelve years ago_

He observed her patiently from the safety of the alley shadows. Today she was attempting to conceal herself in the safety of the harried crowds with her forced indifference, her own purposeful stride. But he knew that her charade was all in vain because she easily stood out among them. Despite the formless, black clothes, the short, austere haircut it was easy to see that she was barely out of her teens, artlessly beautiful and scared. For an instant, he wondered whether she somehow knew she was being watched. Then he caught sight of a livid bruise on her cheek. The bastard. He clenched his fists and resisted the urge to pull her off the sidewalk, to free her from this maddening zoo to show her the real. He will have to bid his time.

Soon, Trinity, soon.

* * *

She half ran half-walked into an alley; unable to dispel the stifling

thought that she was somehow being watched. Looking surreptitiously around, she slid a key into a door hidden behind a large garbage bin. It opened into a cramped room where computers and other electronic hardware shared space with the junk from a nearby motel. It was dark, dingy but more home to her than any place could be.

"Jack? Berg?" she called out to the empty room.

It was obvious that they were not around but the TV and everything else were buzzing with life. She sat at a computer terminal and thought of working on the new Linux code but changed her mind and instead decided to log on at Hacker's Lair over at the ARPHANET. Behind her, a news anchorman monotonously droned In Kansas City yesterday, authorities were baffled by the loss of classified information from the IRS database- their only lead a word left by the perpetrator- TRINITY... _

"It's a name, idiot," she said not realizing that she was smiling for the first time in days. "My name."

Rueful IRS officials admit that this is the first time the database has been breached and are now struggling to prevent further intrusion

She tuned out the rest of the details and gave her devout attention to the colorful conversation at the infamous hacker chat room so renowned for scaring the shit out of newbies.

BUTCHER: Holy shit! Did you hear what that Trinity person just did? Been trying to crack that IRS code for centuries. Christ, it's the fucking Holy Grail of hackerdom!

VISIGOTH: Quit the PC crap, asshole. Doesn't become u. According to our latest poll, Trinity is a guy and yes, he cracked it like a nut. Old news, move on, GET A LIFE.

JINXOID: Hey, it looks like someone's getting green with envy.

VISIGOTH: U talkin' to me? U PHREAKIN' TALKIN' TO ME? Want me to blow ur hard drive to pieces? I think I'll do that right NOW!

She sighed. These guys shouldn't be taking her time but questions were gnawing at her and she hoped they might just know the answers.

TRINITY: Hey, has anyone read the new code yet? I passed it around a couple of days ago.

It seemed that all activities, productive or otherwise, ceased when she entered. They all were holding their breaths.

BUTCHER: ALL HAIL THE KING OF THE HACKERS!!!

SPITFIRE: Welcome, most esteemed one! Trinity of the Hacker Elite!

She felt like laughing. It was a luxury she hadn't indulged in for a long time.

TRINITY: LOL, guys. Anyone heard anything about Morpheus?

CALIGULA: Who cares about Morpheus, Oh Most Holy Trinity. You take the cake, anytime.

JINXOID: Heard he was blowing up federal buildings again while feeding viruses into the Pentagon dbase.

VISIGOTH: Still here, Jinxy prick? My trusty virus didn't get u, yet?

TEDBUNDY: Think Morpheus' on a respite. Nothin' bout him in the newz except you, TRINITY.

TRINITY: What about the Matrix he was raving about?

ROYAN: Could be a new programming language Morpheus is designing.

BEETLEBUM: Or a new game. Can't wait to break its security tags and pirate it.

JINXOID: If it's a game, I'll beat you all to it. Remember DOOM? It had my name all over it.

VISIGOTH: Hey TRINITY, if ur really a good hacker and not a cracker as all of theez sorry, phreakin lamers are, you'll find the answers yourself!

SPITFIRE: Whom are you calling a cracker, CRACKER?

CALIGULA: Speakin' of crackers, where is CrackerJack and the sidekick Iceberg? Missed their UNIX caper.

TRINITY: They're hanging aroundsomewhere.

VISIGOTH: Crackers are not hackers! They're nothin' but cyberscum!

BUTCHER: Like you, old boy?

BEETLEBUM: FLAME ON, GUYS!!!

This was tiring her out. She didn't want to get involved in juvenile flame wars. These people know nothing. Visigoth was right though. She had to find the answers on her own. She logged out to everyone's consternation and placed the computer on a search mode. Till now, nobody knew what Morpheus, the cyber terrorist looked like. But she knew, in her dreams. He was dark and stealthy like the shadows and he freed her from all this pain

The screen went black. She looked at it bewildered. It couldn't have crashed. She crash-proofed it herself. She was staring at it in frustration when it came to life again. This time with a single ghostly sentence floating eerily on it:

* * MOPHEUS COULD FREE YOU FROM THE MATRIX, TRINITY.

She sat there, unmoving, hypnotized. Her mind blank, waiting for the words to coalesce and gain meaning but as suddenly as she saw them,

they were gone.

She startled, her mind dismissing what she had seen. She was tired; her eyes were strained. It was just a glitch. She'd deal with it later.

"We leave you alone for two days, and this is all you do- wreck havoc on an IRS dbase? Congratulations are I think in order!"

"Berg!"

She turned around and stared piercingly at a guy who in stereotypical geek fashion wore the prerequisite glasses and braces. Otherwise, he would have been handsome.

"Hey, I'm sorry! Jeez, those looks of yours could kill! Didn't know you were doing yoga or something."

"Where's Jack?" she asked trying to look grave but losing. Berg always made her laugh. That was how they came to know each other. In school, he was the class clown and the class geek rolled into one. She on the other hand was the girl voted most- likely- to- succeed until she got tired of succeeding. They had kept bumping into each other in detention hall so often; they struck out an easy friendship. He then introduced her to the world of hacking and to Jack.

"CrackerJack my boy, is outside unloading new hardware," Berg replied, staring quite intently at her.

As if on cue, Jack entered lugging a weather beaten CPU. Unlike Berg, Jack seemed to be the poster boy of responsibility, with his clean-cut good looks and serious air. But looks do deceive, and had it not been for her help, Jack would have been doing five to ten years for every computer crime imaginable. Jack was impetuous and headstrong but he looked out for her like the older brother she never had.

"This is where we're going to launch our very own version of that Linux thing," he declared.

" Bet you two grand, that 'thing' will someday crash" Berg said, his eyes never leaving her face. Trinity felt entirely discomfited. She tried to hide the throbbing bruise under her hair. She didn't need their pity.

" And where will you get the money, Mr. Iceberg? Because I assure you that 'thing' is unsinkable." She said, meeting him squarely in the eyes. He looked away, flustered.

"Yeah, they said that also about the Titanic. Look what happened when an iceberg, like me, got to it," he laughed at his own pun.

"Hey, Berg, scoot! I need to talk to Trin," Jack said as he sat directly in front of her.

Berg looked wounded. "Talk, or something else? Not that I'm jealous or something but" he looked flustered again.

"Berg!" they both interjected.

"Okay, okay, hold your horses. I know that a nonentity like me isn't fit to converse with gods like you- would any of you like something to drink? I'm going out for some soda," he left slamming the door.

"What?" She looked up at Jack, apprehensively. She knew what was coming but felt obliged to ask.

"New job. The FBI dbase. It's easy- you have done this before. They just want some guy's records erased. Got to come clean, don't know why." he pulled out a wad of bills from his pocket and placed them on the table. "Three grand, just an advance but I'm giving it to you."

"Who are we dealing with, Jack?" she tried to appear calm but she was increasingly getting agitated. He had done this before. She had warned him against it and now he was at it again.

"Oh, just some guys- no big deal," he was trying to appear nonchalant.

"Christ! Not the Mafia again, Jack!" her voice was already shrill.
"Are you trying to fuckin' kill us?"

"Look, Trin, I'm in it for the money. You need the dough to get away; here's your chance! Besides, they never knew me. I had a contact." He held her trembling hands. She angrily tore away.

"Where are you going?" he looked simultaneously hurt and surprised.

"Home," she flatly said as she gathered her jacket and her laptop.

"Oh Jesus, Trinity, please don't leave. Are you crazy? He made a punching bag out of you again, didn't he? Don't tell me you tripped on your feet. Fuck! Why do you put up with that man?"

"Because he's my father," she replied quietly.

"Shit, Trin. That's no excuse! Stay here! I know this isn't much but we can get money" he was pleading. She looked away from the questions in his eyes unable to answer them.

The truth that was so hard to admit and explain was she was trying to protect her mother. She didn't want to leave her alone at the hands of her bastard of a father. But no matter how she pleaded, her mother didn't want to leave her dad nor press charges in spite of the beatings and the verbal abuse. "I still love him, darling," her mother would tell her each time. Love. If love could get you beaten or worst, killed then she would much rather have her heart turned into stone than suffer its consequences. She would never love, never.

"Trin, I swear if he hits you again- I don't care if he's the father of the President but I'll have the feds and the cops crawling up his sorry ass." Jack was genuinely concerned.

"Look, if I wanted that, I would have done it a long time ago. But I

don't. I can handle this. I won't be a victim. Thanks anyway for the concern." She punched him lightly on the chest.

"Tomorrow, then?" he called out as she left.

"Sure, " she said not looking back, her tears already choking her.

* * *

I wish this were all but a dream.

It was a clear night. The starry fields beckoned so she closed her eyes and wished but the stars were playing deaf to her wishes. She didn't wake up. Everything was as it was. She felt cheated. Her thoughts once again meandered to the mysterious message. Morpheus, free me now.

A gust of wind blew dry leaves across her path and she was suddenly aware that she was alone walking these dimly lighted, suburban streets. The wind blew again and set the shadows into a flurry of motion. From the corner of her eye, she fleetingly saw something or someone leap from a rooftop before disappearing in a copse of trees. That's impossible. She thought she was going crazy. Behind her, she heard feet crushing sodden loam. She was scared but she didn't run. The house was just a few yards away. She quickened her pace instead, all the while cursing to herself. She should have bought a car or a bike instead of her chunky laptop, which was now holding her down. By the time she ran gasping into the house, she was pretty sure she was just imagining things because the streets were as empty as before.

The violent fluorescent glare radiating from the den warned her that her father was slobbering in front of the TV again so she stealthily crept up the stairs, mindful that any false step will fetch his ire. She entered her room and was anxiously surprised to see her mother sitting on her bed.

"Mom, what are you doing here in the dark?" she asked as she turned on the lights. A cry died in her throat. Her mother was disfigured by bruises. "Mom, I'm calling the police," she tried to pacify herself but rage was threatening to blind her. She would kill that bastard!

"No, come here, Trin," her mother was amazingly calm. She drew close and smelled the stink of whiskey on her. Her mother began stroking her hair, "Your hair used to be so black and long, it's a shame you cut it"

"Mother, please let's leave. We have to get you to a hospital"

"All this time why didn't you tell me?" the question came sudden, unbidden and it tore at Trinity's heart like a bullet.

She didn't know what to say. The harsh realm from which she distanced herself was now caving in on her, suffocating her. The dark memories she all kept at bay now poured forth like floodwaters spilling from a dam.

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt or worry you, Mom," she whispered. I don't want you to suffer like I suffered.

"No, don't be sorry. It's not your fault, baby. I know you tried to tell me I didn't listen," her mother broke down, the guilt streaming down along with her tears in torrents. Trinity held her for what seemed to be an eternity. She couldn't cry. She felt disconnected, floating.

"We're leaving." Her mother's voice rang with hard determination. "Pack your clothes. I'm just going to take care of some things" she left, a distracted look on her face.

For a long time Trinity sat on the bed, frozen. Her mother finally knew. No more hiding, no more pretending, no more living in perpetual fear. They were going away and they were going to be free. With her mother safely away, she could do anything now to her repulsive father

The phone rang. The sharp tone pierced her reverie. She answered immediately praying that it didn't awaken her father.

"Trinity" the voice was deep, lulling but almost a whisper. "I have been searching for you for a very long time. I could help you. I could free you. Show you the Matrix"

"Morpheus!" she gasped, recognizing the ominous timbre from her dreams. "Help me, please. My mother-"

"I know. Take the New York subway-"

A gunshot trembled in the silence of the house. Another echoed like a scream. She flung the phone away and ran down the stairs, the shots still reverberating in her head.

"Mom!" she cried. There was no answer. She reached the den, saw her father slumped on his easy chair and her mother sitting on the floor, sobbing. She ran to her, half-crying but relieved.

"Mom, what happened?"

Her mother didn't answer. Her eyes were glazed over with pain but focused on the still form of her father. It was then that she saw the gun in her hand and - the blood trickling down her shirt.

"Mother, please, why?" Trinity knew she wasn't making sense. She was whimpering and shaking her mother's shoulders so hard in her desperation to revive her.

"I shot him," her mother's voice came feeble, fading but firm. "I couldn't forgive him for what he did to you I couldn't forgive myself... nor... live with myself for letting all of these happen to you" she was crying again.

"I forgive you, Mom," Trinity was shivering uncontrollably. She wanted to die now. She couldn't live alone like this

"Go, Trin, please," her mother clasped her cold fingers with her bloodied hands. "You're free. I'm sorry I was never a good mother- but I love you-" she faltered and sighed deeply and suddenly she was gone.

Caught up in a dream, Trinity bent to kiss her mother farewell. She didn't dare look at her dead father. She studied the blood drying on her hands. They were unreal like the tears drowning her eyes. She opened the door slowly. Outside, the night seemed black, insubstantial like a nightmare from which she could not wake. For a moment, she felt disoriented, lost. Then she remembered Morpheus and his promise of freedom.

* * *

**Sick on a journey **

**Over parched fields**

**Dreams wander on.**

-BASHO

It was cold but she kept on walking past streets littered by hookers, vagrants, and other denizens of the night. She felt no fear, no anger. Even her grief had receded into a dull ache in her stomach. Her heart had surely turned to stone. Ahead, she saw an oasis- the familiar steps leading down into the Byzantine maze of the NY subway. She took a deep breath and descended down into the subterranean darkness.

* * *

Morpheus was scared. He didn't know why. This was SOP. They took all the precautions and he knew that soon Crash and Thor will find Trinity and bring her to him. Still he was uneasy. He paced the creaking floor of the condemned motel, oblivious to the efficient hum of activity from the equipment and from his crew.

Damn. He had to get her out now. He had to find her before the agents get to her first. And he couldn't permit that. She could be the One. Even if she wasn't, he cared too much to lose her.

"Cable, come with me," he gestured to the gargantuan man standing guard by the door.

"Morpheus, where are you going?" Flux had left her station and from the look in her eyes she seemed ready for a mutiny. "You can't leave now, they're probably coming-"

"We're finding them," Morpheus cut her short.

* * *

The car rocked so crazily that she thought she would throw up. Bound and blindfolded, Trinity doubted her gut instinct to trust these people. The blissful numbness she felt before was now wearing off and in place was raw, grating terror.

"I'm sorry. We had to tie you up for our protection," a man's voice wafted to her from the darkness.

"You're Thor, right? You single handedly took down the NSA's operating system with your Thor's Hammer virus, didn't you?" she was babbling. They must have thought she was hysterically insane and

right now she really was.

"Yes," The man answered her laconically.

"I have to apologize," this time it was the soothing voice of a woman, Crash. "He just doesn't want to brag about his achievements like we all do".

"I know," Trinity began to say before she was interrupted by the rude cry of a police siren.

"Oh my God, how did they know?" Trinity could hear the cold panic in Crash's voice.

"Untie her quick!"

"We have to ask for help!"

"We can't. The line could be traced-"

"If the agents are here already, what's the use-"

"We could handle this!" Thor sounded certain.

She felt brisk hands undo her blindfold. She blinked and saw Crash's concerned face, framed by burning red tresses. "Will you trust us?" she asked. Trinity nodded. "Then do as you're told and don't say a word because our lives will probably depend on it."

"I'm pulling over," Thor announced, unruffled. Behind them, the police car slowed down to a stop. A cop stepped out and strutted towards them. He grinned smugly at Thor's shaded face.

"Evening, officer," Thor said simply as his fist connected with the cop's unguarded face. It happened so fast that even the cop failed to see what got him. He fell like a dry leaf on the ground. Trinity was shocked into disbelief.

"Go! Go! Go!" Crash was shouting into Thor's ear. Trinity held on bewildered as they sped away. But just before they could make it to the next corner, a squadron of police cars blocked them.

"Hold on!" Thor howled over the cacophony of screeching tires and squealing sirens. "Crash, get her out as soon as we stop!"

At breakneck speed, Thor pummeled into one of the blocking police cars. As soon as they skidded to a punishing halt, Crash pushed Trinity out of the car. Stunned, she let the momentum throw her down into the cover of darkness only to be dragged away by Crash into a dead end alley.

"Listen to me, missy, do as I tell you or get both of us killed!"

Dazed, Trinity could offer no response. She could not begin to comprehend the severity of their situation. "Where's Thor? Is he alright?"

"Duck! They're looking for us!"

She obediently crouched amid the rubbish, conscious only of the heavy glare of the searchlights and of excited voices drawing closer and closer. Till a shadow fell, blocking the light. It was Thor and he immediately engaged the unit of policemen with an arsenal of high-powered kicks and punches. His fluid grace and brisk unbroken motion made him appear to be gliding, floating on air with each jump kick he gave.

"Impossible" Trinity murmured, amazed.

"Trinity!" It was Crash. She had scaled the unbelievably high wall and now was beckoning her to follow. Trinity ran and tried to grab her outstretched arms to no avail. She looked for a solid foothold but found none.

"I can't," she shouted with angry frustration. "Just go! Leave me!"

"We can't," she felt steel arms lifting her; giving her enough leverage to reach Crash's steady hands. "If you're the One, Morpheus will have our heads if we leave you." Thor was suddenly behind her, grinning behind those deadly shades.

They jumped the wall and landed in an alley where a few vagrants were congregating around campfires trying to keep warm. They looked up with mild curiosity.

"Talk about a mission gone bad." Crash's voice was now hoarse with fear. Her hand on Trinity's wrist was a vise grip. "The sewers are our only chance!" She ran dragging Trinity along, Thor backing them.

"Why the sewers? Why are you so afraid of these people?" Trinity's questions came out in gasps. She was tired of their reticence and tired of running away for no particular reason.

"Maybe we should also be afraid of you. Just trust us, please!" Crash retorted tiredly. They were nearing a sewer grate. Thor had run ahead and was pulling the grate off when bullets whizzed past behind him.

"Agents!" he warned before he collapsed, blood staining his black shirt like water.

"No!" Crash cried, running towards Thor's slack body. In her confusion she left her gun on the concrete pavement. Trinity picked it up and reflexively began to fire into the darkness, trying to envision the unknown enemy but all she could see were the blinding flashes of bullets being discharged. Just as suddenly as she couldn't see them, they were there almost in front of her- a couple of federal agents menacingly dressed in black suits, their impassive faces made more forbidding by their dark glasses. They were dodging her bullets with inhuman flexibility. And they kept coming at her. She managed to hit one on the chest, watched him flail before she realized that her clip was now empty.

"Trinity, go now! Run! I'll cover you!" Crash was now firing Thor's gun, her face disfigured by rage. Trinity stared at the sewer hole gaping at her. If she went now, she knew Crash wouldn't be able to make it.

"I can't leave you!" She saw another gun protruding from the small of Crash's back. She took it and began firing at the lone agent.

"What are you doing! I told you to go!" Crash was crying now in exasperation.

"We're both going!" Trinity was surprised to hear the hardness in her own voice. She was tugging now at Crash. They began retreating under the blanket of gunshots.

"You first, I'll distract him so he wouldn't see where we're going," Crash hollered over the din. Powered by adrenaline, Trinity tumbled towards the sewer. In front of her, Crash was still steadily firing at the agent who without warning, crumpled. "Go, before they come back!"

Trinity was clutching the iron railings of the manhole when she heard a single shot behind her. Another agent? Something was terribly wrong. She looked up at Crash, into the horror in her eyes. Something warm was crawling down her arms, filling her mouth. She looked at her chest. Blood. She couldn't breathe. She knew her eyes were open but she couldn't see. There was only darkness, blacker than the sewer's gloom coming towards her- she welcomed it

* * *

"Trinity" His voice was so soft, so comforting she wanted to cry. It roused her from violent dreams of blood and people dying.

"Trinity" He beckoned. She opened her eyes, felt the wracking agony, and closed her eyes again. The pain was no dream. It was real and it was killing her. She moaned.

"Morpheus, I don't think this is the right time to free her. She has to be treated. She could be dying." The voice drifting at her was feminine but unfamiliar. Where was Crash?

"Time is always against us, Flux," Firm, callused hands were gently stroking her sweat- soaked face. "We have to get her now. She is strong. She'll live to fight many battles. Tell Dozer to get ready."

"Morpheus, this hasn't been done before. What if she doesn't-" The weariness in that voice went through the pain- filled haze in her head. Crash was alive! She struggled to lift her head.

"She will make it," His words were measured, certain. She wanted to believe him. She tried opening her eyes and found a dark man gazing down at her. He was haloed by the softest light as in her dreams

"Morpheus-" her voice was a mere whisper but the exertion made her wince from the pain. He placed a finger on her lips, motioning her not to speak.

"At last we meet, Trinity," his voice contained a hypnotic quality that made her almost forget her pain. "Would you let me show you the real? Let me free you from this pain, from the Matrix?"

"The Matrix, what is it?" It was as if the burning pain in her chest had lifted to be replaced by burning curiosity.

"The Matrix is everywhere, Trinity. It is your life, as you know it. It is this world, this reality created to hide from you the truth that we all are mere slaves"

"All of these- a dream?" her eyes began to burn with sudden light. Her miserable life, her haunted memories, all but a dream from which she could wake up. Morpheus saw the glimmer of hope in her wan eyes and he smiled.

"Yes, Trinity, a dream. I could help you wake up and show you the truth. I have to warn you, though. All I offer is the plain, simple truth, nothing more."

"Yes, it's a deal-" she coughed and there was suddenly blood on her lips. He wiped the blood away trying so hard not to let her see his concern. She would die if they didn't free her now while her spirit was strong and her will intact.

He took something from a silver box and opening his palms showed two glistening pills to Trinity. In his left hand was a blue pill, in his right, a red one.

"I could not alone show you what the Matrix is, Trinity. You have to see it with your own eyes." he took her cold right hand and placed the red pill in it. "Take this and you will wake up as if from a dream and I will help you see the truth. Or," he calmly said cradling her left palm and placing the blue pill in it. "Take this and keep on living this dream, this life without us. Just remember that you could never turn back after this."

Trinity stared feebly at the pills in her palms. They were warm unlike her hands. She felt her strength ebbing from her. It wouldn't matter which pill she took. She was dying anyway. She was suddenly tired as if she had fought every war. She just wanted to fall into a deep, dreamless sleep and never... wake up. She glanced at Morpheus, prepared to tell him that she had neither the energy nor the courage to make the journey with him but then she saw his naked eyes... They were unguarded, open and in them she felt rather than saw the sheer force of his belief- in HER. Come with me and help me show people the truth, they seem to proclaim, You will guide me as you guide others. She drew back, overpowered yet energized by his passions. Carefully, she opened her palm and swallowed the flickering gleam of red. Morpheus beamed.

"Tell me I'm dreaming," she smiled weakly.

THE END

August 30, 1999

AMARIE, 1999

End
file.